

All New All Purpose

JOY

of
Reading

Handbook for Montana America Reads VISTAs

PREPARED BY MONTANA AMERICA READS AMERI*CORPS VISTA MEMBERS

MONTANA OFFICE OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION,
LINDA McCULLOCH, SUPERINTENDENT
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*This book is dedicated to
the America Reads VISTAs of 2000-2001,
a most piquant bouquet of personalities,
and to June Atkins,
a certain winner
if there were an Iron Chef contest for literacy.*



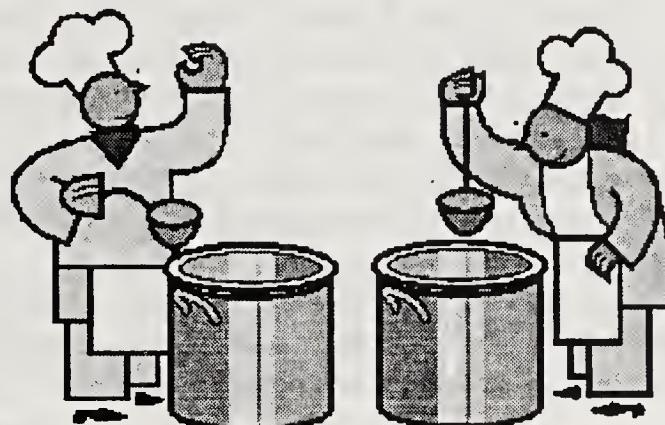
Put on Your Apron . . .

The motto for AmeriCorps is “getting things done.” Previous VISTAs have paraphrased this to “getting things done while waiting for explanations, advice, and money.”

Ultimately, your VISTA year will be what you make of it. It could be the hardest and most fulfilling year of your life, or you could be lazy and deskbound end up not knowing the true nature of public service. Regardless, you don’t have to go at it alone.

This book was compiled from all of the questions, insecurities, and humor that emerged from this year’s America Reads VISTAs. We decided that while we often felt like a Little Red Hen without any help cracking the wheat and baking the bread, we would leave you a recipe to follow so you wouldn’t begin alone. Feel free to alter to suit your own tastes, adding and changing spices and ingredients as desired.

So take what you need, ignore what you don’t. Just don’t blow up the kitchen!



The Basic Ingredients: AmeriCorps Terms To Know And Love



Community Action Plan

This is the set of goals for the America Reads program that you will follow throughout your year of service. It was written at the headquarters at the Office of Public Instruction and approved by the Corporation for National Service. At the beginning of your term you will sit down with your site supervisor and discuss what you plan to accomplish for the next 90 days. The goals of the plan are accompanied by vague timelines such as "1st Quarter" or "Ongoing." Since it is a general plan used by all America Reads VISTAs, it is up to you to interpret the plan with your own host site in mind.

When you have drafted your plan, type it into the template and send it to the Office of Public Instruction. At the end of the first quarter you will fill out the Community Action Plan again, this time with what you have ACCOMPLISHED in the last 90 days. You will also turn in another plan of what you will do during the 2nd quarter. OPI and CNS appreciate receiving newspaper articles, brochures, or pictures along with the report.

Admittedly, past VISTAs have not enjoyed completing the Community Action plan, viewing it as mindless paperwork that nobody looks at. In fact, that couldn't be further from the truth: both OPI and CNS use these reports as documents of accountability and success, which keeps the federal funding coming. The Community Action Plan can also be a useful tool for you to track your progress. Last year's VISTA leader said that doing these reports was easy once she put the template onto her computer. Every time she accomplished something noteworthy she added it to her computer, so when the report was due she only needed to print it off. She kept a master copy that had all four quarters on it so that when her year of service concluded there was a master plan of all her accomplishments.

Let the Community Action Plan be your guide and your jumping off point. If there is an aspect of it that doesn't fit your program, talk to June or your leader about how to tailor it for your program. And always remember to turn it in by the deadline!

Direct vs. Indirect Service

This could also be termed Leadership vs. Stewardship. Regardless of the semantics, the point is that to be a good AmeriCorps leader, you must teach others to lead. When you first come to a community, it is up to you to raise awareness about America Reads and do the tasks to put it in place. However, once you have implemented the program you have to find ways to put it into the hands of the community. America Reads VISTAs are not allowed to do direct service, such as tutoring children. They are in the community to do indirect service, which means mobilizing others. Think of America Reads as Pinocchio. Initially you are the puppeteer, controlling its movements to reach desired outcomes. But Pinocchio's ultimate goal was to be a real boy, and your ultimate goal is to make America Reads become its own functioning entity (see Sustainability.) As hard as this is, this means that you have to step aside and let others take over aspects of your program. You want to "work yourself out of a job."

Mission Statement

A mission statement is a short explanation of what you plan to accomplish with your project. America Reads has a general mission statement from its Clinton inception: To ensure that children are all able to read well and independently by the third grade. When you start your term at your own host site, you might want to alter this mission statement to suit the specific nature of your program. Talk with your site supervisor about his or her overall goals, combine it with yours, and come up with a statement that reflects how you want to improve or empower your community. Not only can this be a personal motivator, but it is a good foundation for explaining your program to community members. You can put it in your brochure, or use it as the thesis statement of an informational speech.

The only hard rule for a mission statement is that it should be concise. Anything more than a paragraph is too much. It would also help to be realistic within your idealism. Having the mission statement of “every child will be able to read Tolstoy after one semester with an America Reads tutor” is certainly noble, but you may end up disappointed.

Reading Council

A reading council is a group of teachers and other literacy advocates that work to promote literacy in a community. The top of this umbrella is IRA, the International Reading Association. The state organization is the Montana State Reading Council, or MSRC. This body is made up of local councils throughout the state.

Your local reading council should be one of your first contacts you make in your community. These are the individuals that will share your passion for literacy, and they can tell you the history of reading promotion in your community. When it's time to form a coalition, the reading council should be on your invite list. If you want to write a community grant, partner up with the reading council and you will improve your chances of receiving funds. You may even find a member of a reading council who is willing to take over your program after your year of service, ensuring sustainability. If there is no reading council in your area, try to work with one that is closest geographically. If you can recruit ten people in your community to be IRA members, you can work on starting a chapter in your community.

Reading Recovery

Reading Recovery is another reading improvement program that may be present in your school. Some VISTAs often have trouble implementing America Reads programs because schools feel that they already have enough reading tutoring programs. Some even have non-AmeriCorps sponsored America Reads programs. When this occurs, do not look at the other programs as competition. All programs have the aim to improve reading skills in K-12 schools. Look for ways to align the programs and collaborate with reading teachers. Show how you can help make their program stronger with your volunteer recruitment and literacy events. If a school feels that they don't need your help you should still contact them when forming your coalition. Your project is more likely to get grant company if you can say that you're partnering with schools that have similar literacy programs.



Stakeholder

At the PSO, you may have a trainer that talks a lot about the difference between partners and stakeholders.

After polling current America Reads VISTAs, no one has figured out the difference. During our year of service we have

used the term stakeholder, and our working definition has been that a stakeholder is anyone who can help and/or be helped by your program. This represents a wide range of community members and organizations. Stakeholders closest to home would include the faculty and staff of the school site and the parents of children being tutored. A step away from that would be any non-profit organization dedicated to helping youth. It could also be a local business, or a national business with a franchise in the community.

When you arrive at your host site, sit down with your site supervisor and brainstorm a list of stakeholders. Then keep this list in an easy-to-reference place. It will be helpful when it's time to make the communications plan, when trying to recruit volunteers, and when fundraising.

Sustainability

Sustainability is a major component of the success of your program. The AmeriCorps definition of sustainability is that your reading program continues long after your term of service is over. This requires a strict practice of indirect service and plenty of community involvement.

Sustainability can be achieved in a variety of ways. When you form a literacy coalition, you may find a way to streamline volunteer recruitment enough that one source will send volunteers to your schools, and an elementary teacher can make sure that there will always be a tutoring space and leveled books. You could find a parent that has volunteered for the program and is eager to do more and train her as the school's volunteer coordinator.

If no one at the school is interested or has the time to take on America Reads duties, you could find ways to make the America Reads Coordinator a paid position. This usually involves writing grants or finding other forms of federal funding.

Title One

A Title I school is a compensatory program that helps students who need to improve academic skills as identified through a screening process. Funds are allocated to these schools based on the percentage of children with free and reduced lunches.

Some America Reads schools may be Title I, but not all. In fact, America Reads often helps children who are not eligible for Title I funds but still need extra help with reading.

When you get to your host site it is important to see if you are at a Title I school, and to make a contact with a Title I teacher. Often these teachers can help with tutoring practices and give additional means of support. You may encounter a Title I teacher that uses different tutoring practices than America Reads. If this is the case, do not feel that you have to adhere strictly to America Reads practices. The goal is that children improve their reading skills.

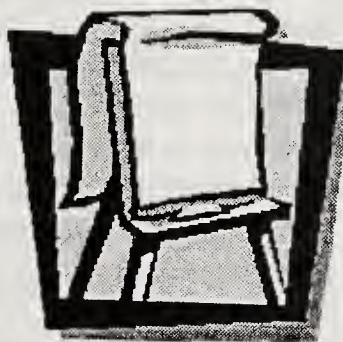
Trainings

Being in AmeriCorps is all about attending trainings. You start with a PSO where you meet people doing projects throughout the western United States. After that the

trainings will be Montana-based, but the agenda and subject matter will be similar. At the Early Service Training (EST) you'll meet in Helena with the other America Reads VISTAs as well as those starting Prevention Resource projects. Here you'll get a crash course on how to implement an America Reads program, you'll talk with your supervisor about the Community Action Plan, and you'll get some general workshops on issues like Community Building, Conflict Resolution, and Volunteer Mobilization.

In the fall you may attend a Montana State Reading Council reading conference and the Governor's Conference on Civic Engagement. In the spring you'll attend a spring training similar to the Governor's Conference. National trainers come to these conferences to train you on topics relevant to not-for-profits. These speakers may teach you in a variety of formats, from a straight lecture to games to small group activities. You can usually find one that suits your learning style. The hallmark of any AmeriCorps training is the flipchart. If it's not in the room, you're at the wrong conference!

Trainings usually last two or three days and are held at a hotel in one of the larger cities such as Great Falls, Helena, Billings, or Butte. In addition to the trainings, there are often speakers at mealtimes and fun after-hours activities. Since Montana is a big state and America Reads VISTAs don't get a lot of chances to meet, these conferences are often times of VISTA bonding. Make the most of them by learning all you can and bouncing ideas off of your colleagues. And if it's possible, save the environment and network by carpooling with other AmeriCorps members in your area!



Kitchen Utensils—They help you get the job done: The AmeriCorps Cast of Characters



As with any federal program, there are many rungs in the ladder of AmeriCorps VISTA. You are your own boss as far as meeting the goals in the Community Action Plan, yet you defer to your site supervisor in areas of school policy and you answer to June Atkins and the Office of Public Instruction for America Reads practices. June herself answers to the Corporation for National Service based on the terms of the federal grant she submitted for the project. Between all of these entities it can get sufficiently confusing.

When you're pulling your hair out trying to think of whom to ask what question, refer to these tips and expectations of the AmeriCorps cast of characters.

The Corporation for National Service (CNS)

The Corporation for National Service is the entity responsible for dispersing funding to AmeriCorps projects throughout the United States. Its national headquarters are in Washington D.C., and that is the office where you send forms concerning direct deposit and loan deferment. However, when you have questions about AmeriCorps at the federal level you should call the Montana branch of the CNS. The contact information for the Montana CNS is: 208 N. Montana Ave, Helena, MT 59601; 406-449-5404. The employees are:

John Allen: John is the head honcho and makes all of the final decisions concerning project policies and procedures. You'll often see him poking his head into a training to see how things are going.

Jackie Girard: Jackie is a program specialist with a lot of experience in grant writing and reviewing, and she had a big part in editing and finalizing the text of this year's America Reads grant. She also does a lot of the work involved in setting up the training calendar and bringing in trainers and speakers.

Jane Piilola: Jane is probably the woman to whom you will be directing most of your questions. If you're curious about your relocation expenses, stipend, education award, tax queries, AmeriCorps health insurance, or similar topics Jane has the answer. She can tell you what the Corporation pays for and what they don't. Her email is jpiilola@cns.gov.

The CNS folks are all very nice and helpful about answering your questions. However, they are the top rung in the hierarchy and often it is best to call June or someone at OPI first before calling the Corporation.

The Office of Public Instruction (OPI)

The Office of Public Instruction is the state education headquarters led by Superintendent Linda McCulloch. It is the sponsoring organization for the America Reads VISTA project. The America Reads employees are:

June Atkins: June is not only the head of America Reads, but she also heads the AmeriCorps Learn and Serve project and is the reading specialist for the state of Montana. As you can expect, she is quite a busy lady! She travels throughout the state a lot, but if you leave a message on her voicemail or email, she will get back to you as soon as she gets back to the office. If you have a question on how to run the America Reads program, or ANYTHING concerning literacy, June is a clearinghouse for such

information. If you have a problem with your supervisor or you need to find a regional trainer, June will get the information to you. Her phone number is 406-444-3664 and her email is jatkins@state.mt.us. Besides being there to answer your questions and give guidance on the program, you can also expect June to pay a site visit to your school at some point during the AmeriCorps year (usually when the roads are good.) She'll sit down with you and your site supervisor and talk about how your program is doing. Please note: if she visits you three weeks after you start working don't freak out if you don't have any volunteers. June understands that these things take time. June also leads specific America Reads trainings at the state conferences. Current America Reads VISTAs agree that June is tireless in her pursuit of literacy as well as a snappy dresser!

Joan Franke: Joan is June's secretary at OPI. She is responsible for booking hotel rooms for trainings and reimbursing VISTAs for such events. If you're going to be late to a training, call Joan! If June is traveling and you have a technical AmeriCorps question rather than a policy question, call Joan. The only caveat is that Joan is only in the office between 1-5 p.m., and she does not have voicemail, so call in the afternoon at 406-444-9864, or send her an email at jfranke@state.mt.us.

OPI VISTA: June will have at least one America Reads VISTA housed at OPI. This person provides administrative support and communications for the program, and basically works on an as-needed basis for June. If June is out of the office and you have a burning AmeriCorps question, ESPECIALLY if it concerns the Community Action Plan, call this person. They can be very helpful, and since they're your equal rather than your supervisor you might feel more comfortable asking certain questions. They are also in charge of distributing OPI administrative information on the America Reads listserv. Their number is 406-444-0256.

In addition to these folks, OPI can also offer support for other aspects of the AmeriCorps project. For instance, if you have a press release, the media person at OPI will disperse it to all of the newspapers in the state. They may also be able to provide extra funding for you if you are a Title One school. If you think this might be the case, you know whom to call!

Site Supervisor

Is your site supervisor your boss? She is and she isn't. You should answer to her in the areas of school policies and recording your hours. However, your project is directed by the Office of Public Instruction. In order to have you on board as a VISTA, this supervisor had to submit a proposal to OPI. When they were selected, they had to sign a memorandum of agreement that stated the understood what the VISTA was allowed to do for the program and other general expectations. Even though this was a signed document, some VISTAs had some trouble with their supervisors and what they were supposed to do. For instance, one supervisor thought that her VISTA should only work at her school, when a major component of America Reads is outreach. Another VISTA had no access to email, and therefore missed out on all of the information distributed via the America Reads listserv.

As soon as you meet your site supervisor, it's important to agree on expectations and procedures. After this initial discussion you should set a schedule on when to meet one-on-one with your site supervisor throughout the year. In addition, your supervisor should provide you with the following things:

- **An appropriate workspace.** You may not get the corner office with the great view, but you SHOULD get a space that has a place for you to store information and that is quiet enough for you to work. You should not have to sit in the noisy teacher's lounge, especially when it's time to call volunteers. If you want to work after hours, check with a supervisor to see if it's feasible to have a key to the building.
- **Tech support.** You should have access to a telephone with voicemail or an answering machine. While the school may not be able to provide you with your own computer, you should be able to access email at least once a day to get information off of the listserv, and be able to use word-processing programs for communications.
- **Funding for outreach.** If your job requires you to drive a significant amount, check with your supervisor about gas mileage reimbursement. If you are a Title One school, check with OPI about this reimbursement.
- **Training Attendance.** Your supervisor should be able to accompany you to trainings, **ESPECIALLY THE EST**. If they cannot accompany you, they should set up a time where you explained what you learned in trainings.
- **Respect and Space.** Your supervisor should understand it is not their job to decide what you should do—your job is outlined in the Community Action Plan. As far as keeping hours, your supervisor can decide what hours you can work, as long as they understand that you are allotted ten sick days and ten vacation days a year. If they say you can work on a comp time basis, that's up to them.

Site supervisors come in all varieties—from the one who's too busy to check up on you more than twice a week to the one that micromanages you at every turn. As with all job relationships, it's up to you to see where your work styles meet. Most importantly, be proactive and set expectations at the beginning. This will reduce conflicts later on in the year. If you feel that your site supervisor is not adhering to the expectations of the program do not hesitate to call June. That's what she's there for!

Teachers & Other Staff

The teachers at your school site are responsible for telling you which students need to be tutored. They are also in charge of leveling the books according to each child. Beyond that, please do not expect teachers to help you, and it's not because they don't care about you or your program. It is no secret that teachers are overworked and underpaid. While some may love to help you with America Reads, they may already be in charge of coaching the basketball team and running the school fundraiser. Sometimes you may get a teacher who is ready to take over the entire project when you leave, but don't expect this as the norm. So give them awhile to fill out paperwork because they probably have a pile of papers to grade, and don't push them to take on parts of your

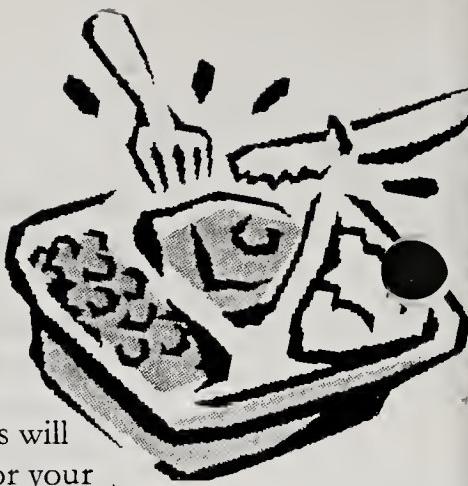
project. Most importantly, BE NICE to the teachers and duly recognize them for helping you out. This will get you the most support of all.

On the same token, be accommodating to the rest of the staff. Befriending the secretary is a great idea, because she is the true leader of the school. Treat the janitorial staff as you would a teacher. However, DON'T get conned into being a teacher's aide, because that's not what you're there for. If someone tries to get you to make copies for them, politely say "I'm really busy with XYZ for the America Reads program and that's my priority here. But if I have time later I'd be glad to help you out." Then follow up by offering help when you DO have time and you may get reciprocity from the teacher from your program.

Another important issue is school gossip. Teachers will gossip, and it will be tempting to join in to gain acceptance. Don't give in: nine times out of ten your gossip will come back to haunt you. Current AmeriCorps VISTA Margaret Augustine has this to say about gossip. "Never speak ill of one person to another person. If you must vent, call on one of your fellow VISTAs or the America Reads office. If someone is bad-mouthing someone else, say "well, they haven't done any harm to me yet" or "I don't know them well enough to say." If you do know them "I have to work with (or am friends with) that person and would rather not talk about them." It may be hard but you will gain respect in the long run."



Communications: “It’s in there.”



A vital part of implementing the America Reads program in a community is a good communications plan. In some cases, a town may have never heard of the America Reads program. Sometimes schools will implement the program under other auspices, and therefore will not see a need for your AmeriCorps-based involvement. In an ideal situation, a community will realize a need for reading tutoring programs in schools and their ears will be open for information on how to participate.

As a VISTA, it is your job to make the community have knowledge of what America Reads is, why it can help the children of their community, and how they can be a part of the program. You must be the public relations representative, the advertising strategist, and the salesperson. In the corporate world, these jobs are done by entire agencies of people. In a Montana community, you ARE the agency. How can this daunting task be made easy? There's no need to recreate the wheel. Just follow the rules of the great admen and former America Reads VISTAs.

- **Know Your Product.** Be as informed about the America Reads program as you can. How has it changed from the Clinton to the Bush administration? What is its mission statement? These are things that you may never have to tell a potential volunteer, but you would certainly want to know the answer if you were being interviewed on the radio. You should also make sure you can give some qualitative as well as quantitative data about how the program has influenced Montana communities. If you are not the first AmeriCorps VISTA, read about the successes of last year's program. If this is the first America Reads program, be ready to share stories about other Montana communities that have benefited from America Reads.
- **Know Your Market.** Now that you are informed, you need to decide WHO you need to inform and HOW you're going to do it. Different people need different stimuli. For example, when a studio is planning to release a movie, they produce several trailers. They may make one that features all of the action shots of buildings blowing up and cars going off cliffs to lure in the male audience, and will strategically place it before an Arnold Schwarzeneggar film. Another trailer may focus more on the love story that occurs in between violent acts and will be shown before a romantic comedy. It's the same movie, but its viewers will be tempted to see it for different reasons. When you are thinking of ways to pitch America Reads, think of the benefits as perceived by a school teacher as opposed to a local business leader. Would you recruit a Foster Grandparent differently than you would a teen mentor?
- **Know Your Media Outlets.** Once you've decided how to talk up the benefits of the program, you need to figure out where to do it. Different markets, besides needing different stimuli, also have different ways of receiving information. If you hang up a flier at the local grocery store you may think you have cornered the market since everyone has to purchase food. But what about the elderly that receive Meals on Wheels? What about the mother who is so busy corralling her three children that she

doesn't even glance at the community bulletin board? When you promote the America Reads program, use a variety of media to reach the widest possible audience. And don't forget PR! The main difference between advertising and public relations is that advertising is paid for and PR is free. With an AmeriCorps budget, you can guess which one you'll be using! However, as a not-for-profit there are many ways that you can use advertising media in a public relations manner. Some examples:

Newspapers

If you have the budget, you can take out a classified or block ad asking for volunteers to come and help at your school. This will probably be effective. However, if you've ever tried to sell your car or rent your apartment, you know that a few words can mean a lot of money. If you want newspaper coverage, you should write a press release. A press release is written like a newspaper story, only you are the reporter and the "news" is the event or activity that you're trying to promote. When it's time to recruit volunteers, write a couple of paragraphs about the success of the program and include ALL of the details about how to be a volunteer for your program. Put yourself down as a contact and send it to all of the local as well as regional papers. News dailies often need a human interest or "feel-good" story, and America Reads certainly fits the bill. You'll be surprised at how quickly you'll get a call from a reporter.



If you want statewide coverage, send your press release to OPI, and their media representative will send it out to all of the newspapers in Montana. Also, don't just use the paper when it's time to recruit volunteers: every time you have a literacy event let the local media know.

see Appendix for sample Press Release article

Television & Radio

As a not-for-profit, you should never have to pay for commercial space to promote América Reads, as there are free ways to talk about it on television and radio. As with newspapers, you can send a press release to regional television and radio stations. Those five minutes at the end of the local news are perfect for highlighting Dr. Seuss' birthday events at your elementary school. You can also produce your own PSA, or public service announcement. For radio, the station will usually let you use their equipment to produce a short pitch for America Reads. If you own your own video camera and like to play Stanley Kubrick you could produce a short television PSA. When doing these, keep in mind that shorter is better and to repeat important information like your name and phone number, and make sure that the station has this information as well. Also note that because the space is free, paying clients will be more likely to be on during radio drive time or television prime time, and you may be squeezed between Conan O'Brien and the VegeMatic infomercial. But your best volunteer could be a raging insomniac!



Brochures & Fliers

Brochures and fliers are a good way to pitch America Reads because they can contain more detailed information than a PSA or a press release. With strategic placement, they are also a great way to attract local interest. The materials don't have to

be costly either. Most likely your host site will allow you to use software and paper to make your own brochures. If not, Insty-Prints will print a certain number of brochures and fliers for not-for-profit organizations. When making your brochures, don't be too wordy, make your contact information big, and CHECK YOUR SPELLING. It would be VERY embarrassing to distribute a brochure for a reeding-tootering program, wouldn't it? When you're done checking the spelling, have someone else proof it before you send it to the printers.



If you need some graphics, OPI has America Reads and other AmeriCorps logos that you can paste onto your materials.

Once you've produced your perfectly grammatical brochures and fliers, get out your list of stakeholders. These should be the first places that you place your brochure. Send some home with children for parents to look at. Put some in the break room at a local hospital that will allow its employees to tutor on their lunch break. Give some to the high school guidance counselor. Don't forget outreach areas: post some at the main store in smaller towns.

No matter where you post your brochures and fliers remember: ALWAYS ASK FIRST and check the sites to make sure that there are plenty of brochures and that no one has defaced or tacked a garage sale sign over your fliers.

You As the Media Outlet

As wonderful as all the aforementioned media and PR outlets are, YOU are one of the most dynamic and powerful media tools. This doesn't mean that you should stand on the street corner with a sandwich board—although it might be effective! It means that your direct words and behavior can have quite an effect on a community's perception of America Reads. Past AmeriCorps VISTAs have found much success by giving oral presentations. You'll get plenty of practice pitching the program to school staff and faculty: take your act on the road. Talk to a Kiwanis group at their monthly meeting. Go to a high school civics class to recruit teen mentors. Don't be afraid to go to a local business and introduce yourself. One VISTA gave a talk to a group of older gentleman that hung out in the coffee shop every morning. You never know who might be interested in being a literacy volunteer.

By the same token, remember that your actions when you are NOT wearing the America Reads hat can also influence community perception, especially in the small towns of Montana. After hours you are certainly allowed to do what you like, but keep in mind that many people know who you are, and that the people that see you dancing on the bar may be the volunteers you try to recruit at the bank the next day. More importantly, always be a literacy advocate, even when you're not at your host site. Many VISTAs have found volunteers, and personal edification by joining book clubs. Make it known that reading is just as important to you as it is to students.

Although a communications plan is one of the first things you do for volunteer recruitment, it should be an ongoing process. Don't just promote the program at volunteer recruitment times, but every time you have a book drive or a literacy awareness event. The goal is to make America Reads a familiar vocabulary term to the members of your community. This familiarity is a major component of sustainability, because it makes the community aware of the need for the program.

Above all, have fun and be creative with your communications plan. If you have a wacky idea about putting the America Reads logo on those big paper clips, call a promotions company and see if they'll cut you a deal. If you think dressing up like "The Cat in The Hat" and giving out candy at a local fair will promote literacy, call the costume shop. And don't forget about intra-AmeriCorps collaboration. It might seem impossible to produce your own television PSA, but you could have a lot of fun making it with other AmeriCorps members in your area. Getting the word out is a major part of "getting things done."

Keeping the Pantry in Order: Databases

Databases are a great tool for organizing so many things. As an America Reads VISTA, it has been really useful in organizing tutors, students, teachers, schools, and tutoring information. I have all my information in one database that I can easily access for information, reports, and notes. The database can be a pain to set up, I won't deny it, but once you get it going and help it to grow as you need it, it becomes so simple you wonder why you balked in the first place.



The database program that I have used is Microsoft Access 2000. I work on an IBM compatible computer. I have been told that Mac has their own database programs, including File Maker, but I strongly urge you to find an IBM compatible. IBMs are better suited to business applications, like databases. It really will be up to the school you're at as to what you get, so we don't really have much choice.

I started out with Access '97, but after a few months I was able to upgrade to Access 2000. Most school computer labs, especially at the high school, should have Microsoft Office, of which Access is a part. The computer technician should be able to download the program to your school computer.

There are books available that detail how to use Access. We purchased one aid in the start up of my database and to educate the office; you might be able to find one at the library. Some books are better than others: know what you want before you get a book. The book we purchased, Access 2000 Simplified (IDG Books Worldwide), is very easy to follow, helps to set up a simple database, and answers some of the questions about how and why are things as they are in Access. However, it does not explain some of the finer points of how to do things. I had to look at pre-fab'd databases to figure out code and what things meant. The Help link on the toolbar doesn't always answer it all either.

I'll walk you through some of the things that I did in my database and what I use it for. I will include several examples of what things look like as well as telling you the code that I searched madly for. Those who are interested in using Mac programs, the basics will be about the same, i.e. tables, forms, reports. If you have a background in computers and any other Microsoft Office programs, Access will not be so foreign to you. If you have had a class in Access, you won't need to read this and you can go your own way. Having used Excel and Word a lot in the past, Access language and method was not hard to crack. I'm going to present this with an assumption that you have some understanding of Access.

Basic Database Set Up: Wizard vs. Blank

I have two databases. One is for the books that I use in the program and the other is for my tutoring program. Access does have some really great Wizards for database set up, and I could suggest using them.

The Book Collection Wizard is all set up and great to use if you have it. The Wizards will tell you the information it needs to set up your database, you input as necessary, and when it is finished, so are you. You are all ready to input book information, and it is ready to receive and organize it.

My America Reads database was something I had to configure on my own. I did look at my already completed Library database for reference, ideas, and help. The other Wizards didn't quite fit my needs and it was too complicated to retool them after I had used them. It was easier to start from scratch.

Basic Start up Information

Tables

The table is where you're going to start with your information. This is where you can break down your data into smaller packets that you can bring together for reports, etc. I have four basic tables with information that I can then link, or create relationships, among. The four basic tables are titled Teachers, Schools, Students, and Tutors.

The two simplest are the Teacher table, which has three fields: Teacher ID, Teacher Name, Class Grade; and the Schools table, which has two: School ID, School Name. The School table is necessary for me because I have tutors at three elementary schools. The "ID" field is necessary in all the tables and is assigned the Autonumber and table key. This field with Autonumber helps the computer be sure it doesn't mix up records or repeat them unless you tell it to. This is also how I create the relationships between the tables, more on that below.

The Tutor table has all my information about tutors. Apart from the Tutor ID, I have their names, address, phone numbers, availability, email, start date, and check-boxes to tell me when they have attended training and signed our liability release form. I also have a field for memos so I can remember things in reference.

The Students table has a bit more information and requires relationships with the teacher and schools tables. The Students table has a minimum of four fields-Student ID, Student Name, Teacher ID, School ID-but can have as many as you would like. Both the Student ID and Teacher ID datatype will be numbers, not text, because you will not be typing this information in, but importing it from the other fields.

Relationships

This is what allows you to share information between tables without a lot of copying and rewriting. It also allows the computer to recognize the connection so it can put together the data for you.

Once the tables are filled out with the fields that I want, I have to create the relationships by showing the computer how to link them. Under Tools in the menu bar, you will see Relationships. Once you are in this format, open the tables. You will see boxes with a listing of the field names in each table. You create relationships by lifting and dropping between the boxes.

For example, I want a relationship between the Schools and Students tables. The way to link these is by the "School ID" you have listed in both of them. Highlight

“School ID” in the Schools table, drag it over to the other “School ID” and drop it. You will see a line connecting the two of them. They are now connected. The “1” that is beside the Schools table, tells the computer that it is the primary table. Alterations can go on in the Schools table, but not in the Students table. This helps to minimize confusion and computer error in the long run.

Here's a simple code thing you might find is frustrating you. Once you create relationships and return to the tables, you will find that where you have the ID fields are a bunch of numbers instead of names. It took me a while to figure out, but if you look at the table you're getting the info from, you see that the numbers are probably in the first column. Let me give you an example of my own. In the Teacher table I have three columns, but when I go to the list linked to the Student table, I only want to see their names, which are in column two.

First, in the Student table, switch to Design View, then choose the Teacher ID field. In the “Lookup” tab, choose “List Box” for a Display Source; choose “Table/Query” for Row Source Type; “Teachers” for your Row Source. I am now sure to get a link to the correct table of teachers when I want to access one for the Student table.

Here's how to make sure I only see their names: The Bound Column is “1”. Column 1 in my Teachers table is the auto number. The Column Count is “3”, because in the Teachers table I have 3 columns. However, I only want to see the teacher's names when I look at the table. Their names are in the second column in the Teacher table. I can hide the first and third columns by writing in Column Widths: 0”;2”;0.5”. This is telling the computer to give these amounts of space to the columns of information. Now when I write in the name of a student, I don't have to write in the teacher as well. Instead I will get a list of teachers names and I can simply highlight the one I want. The first column will not be seen as it is given 0” of space, and the third column is negligible.

Forms

The form is handy as a way of filling in a table. I don't tend to use it as I would rather input directly into a table. It does work nicely, though, if you have a lot of checkboxes or note/memo fields. Then you aren't scrolling left and right incessantly. You can do more with it, but I haven't found I needed to use them.

Reports

The ability to do reports is one of the biggest reasons for using a database. I am able to tell the computer what I want, using a report Wizard, and it can spit it all out for me. My information is all stored neatly in the tables. The computer can then manipulate it for me with just some simple instructions. I can find out quickly which books are needed at which schools, send print-outs to teachers of tutoring info for their students, print out schedules for tutoring at the different schools. “It's so good.”

contributed by VISTA chef Sarah L. Hill

Shopping For Volunteers: Volunteer Recruitment



Now that you have a communications plan down it's time to start looking for volunteers! Here are two case studies based on America Reads projects in the small town of Harlowton and the booming metropolis of Great Falls.

Working in small towns

No matter how much pressure you are getting to start a literacy program, hold off for a while and get to know what groups are doing what in town. It seems that at least 40 percent of the work done in a small town is done by volunteers, such as ambulance, chamber of commerce, rodeo, youth centers, 4-H, town beautification, senior services and many, many more. I believe if you start by doing a survey of all the work volunteers are doing you will both learn about the town and find out who is doing what with youth and reading. You may also find out that the volunteer work is being done by the same people in different groups. Making a list of volunteer work may pleasantly surprise the town members and be a gift from you to them. Out of this survey you can hopefully find a group to become part of the literacy coalition. Start with your supervisor and ask hem (gender neutral word which means him or her) to name some volunteer work. Every organization you visit with, ask them whom they can think of who volunteers.

Respect local customs. There may be a time later in the year when you can work to affect change on customs you think are horrid, but at first respect all local customs and if something bothers you, ASK. The local sheriff is a good person to ask because she (gender neutral word which means she or he), believe it or not, can answer a lot of questions about odd behavior and is one of the best in town for keeping things confidential. The sheriff will NOT be down at the coffee shop saying "That gol darned VISTA wanted to know why all the boys drive around the park honking their horns on graduation night. Said it bothered hes (gender neutral word meaning his or hers) sleep." It's a custom in Montana for dogs to ride in the open backs of trucks and for kids to accompany their parents into bars. Proving yourself to be a good worker and the passage of time will allow you to express your views later in the year. It's not that there aren't any people who have "liberal" views in town; you just need to be quiet until you find them.

Walk or bicycle to work.

Find a friend or ask to be hooked up with someone who lives outside of town, especially someone who works in agriculture. It is great R&R to be invited to or offer to help at a branding or other ranch work. And permission to "camp out" on the ranch is great. Take a bedroll, go after supper, return home in the morning and it will be good for your soul.

Bug the America Reads VISTA office and AmeriCorps about recognizing that, due entirely to population, small towns face different problems than do larger cities.

Small towns in Montana are struggling. The friendliness, excellent moral code, humor, and respect found in them are beyond price. Their gratitude for the work you will do is immense.

Have fun.

contributed by VISTA chef Margaret de Harlow

VISTA in the Big City

Chuck Dukeshire not only worked in the "big city" of Great Falls, but he also worked in an inter-agency setting. His VISTA host site was at Cascade County Aging Services for the Foster Grandparent program. Other programs at Aging Services included RSVP, Meals on Wheels, Medicare consulting, and Food Commodities. He was also working in a city with many other not-for-profit agencies. While your community may not hit the 50,000 population mark like Great Falls, Chuck's experiences may give you some insight as to how to work in a larger community, how to collaborate with other agencies, and how to recruit older volunteers.

Because he was an America Reads VISTA for the Foster Grandparent program, Chuck's parameters for volunteer recruitment were quite narrow. In order to be a Foster Grandparent a person must be over 60 years old, have a limited income, and commit to 20 volunteer hours a week. With 15 elementary schools in the community needing reading tutors, Chuck knew that he would have to work hard to find his unique volunteer market.

His most successful recruitment meeting was at a local retirement home. Although there were only six people, the majority of them signed up to be volunteers. He was also able to make a contact with the activities director of the facility, who allowed him to put up posters and stick inserts in the resident newsletter.

Other retirement homes, however, were not so successful. Chuck did not initially realize that some homes had such high rents that they would certainly not be eligible for Foster Grandparent status. in these cases he could recruit them under the RSVP program, which only requires that a tutor be over 55. He eventually wrote up a sheet with requirements for both programs so that no one had to announce their age or income. This discretion proved beneficial.

Another factor Chuck encountered while recruiting was not knowing the status of volunteers' health. At one home he had nearly signed up two volunteers when the director informed him that they were both suffering from Alzheimer's. After this he made sure to talk to directors before recruitment meetings at retirement homes.

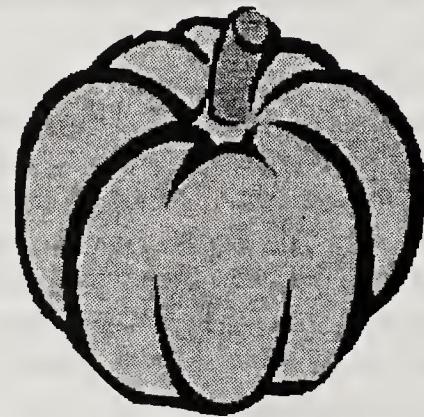
In a larger community it can be more difficult to make connections with all stakeholders. Chuck's advice is to do a little bit of direct service volunteer work on the side. He participated in a project called Continuum of Care that set out to track the homeless population in Montana. Through this project he met the editor of the local paper. This contact was not only valuable for PR, but the through this individual Chuck was able to get special guest speaker Peter Fromm at his volunteer ice cream social. While Chuck emphasizes that America Reads should be the #1 priority, it can be beneficial personally and professionally to help other service projects in the community.

Funding can also be a different story in a larger community. While Chuck did not write any grants during his year of service, he noted that more money is often given to inter-agency entities because it serves a larger body of people. When it came time to solicit cash and in-kind donations for events, some businesses would turn Chuck down because the had already been hit up by other non-profits. He found that bigger chains like Wal-Mart and Pizza Hut were more willing to make donations, and it helped that they had already established relationships with his agency.

In fact, recognizing these community relationships between businesses and organizations is one of the most important tasks of your term of service, according to Chuck. Regardless of the size of your community, you are walking into an agency that has already established a rapport with other businesses. It is imperative to learn the

dynamics between agencies, their employees, and their constituents. As Chuck says “map your political arena.”

contributed through interview by VISTA chef Chuck Dukeshire



Kitchen Safety: Taking Precautions With Background Checks

Every volunteer should have a background check run on them, and references called for the safety of our children. To handle this matter in the least restrictive and discriminatory way, every volunteer needs to be handled in the same manner.

When a volunteer signs up to be in your program, doing a personal interview is a great idea. Here you can gather information and find out where this volunteer would be most useful as well as give them paperwork to fill out. Folders are a great presentation. In the folder you can have some information about the America Reads Program, the school district, being a volunteer, etc, for them to keep as a reference.

Paperwork that the volunteer should fill out includes: A Volunteer Information Form, which asks for contact information and references as well as questions about reading habits; your school district's Authorization to Release Information form; and a form for the tutor to list the best days that she can tutor.

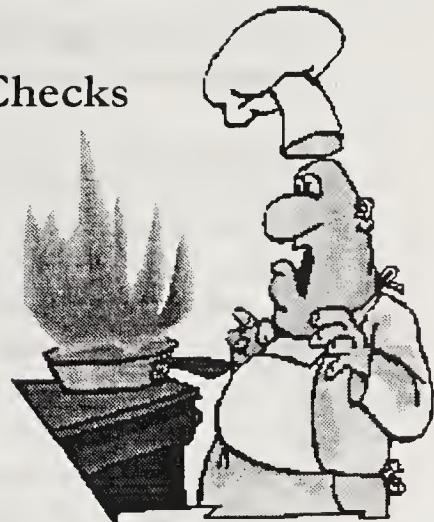
After your initial meeting with the potential tutor you will need to check the personal references they listed and run a background check at your local law enforcement office. To run this check you will need their signed permission, birth date, and Social Security number. You may also have to pay a fee, usually around \$5 per profile. You can ask the law enforcement agency if they would donate the cost of the check to support the America Reads program. You could also ask the school to cover this expense. Most will comply since these volunteers are entering their schools. Regardless, these checks must be done on ALL potential volunteers, and if no one is willing to pay for it then you will have to raise the money for this necessary step.

There is also a list of all sex offenders in the area at your local law enforcement office. This information is open to the public, but you must ask for it. This would be a good list to have in your files.

Once the background checks are complete and you have called all of the references you can set up a training for the new volunteers that have checked out okay. If some individuals do not have a record that is conducive to tutoring children, it is the role of your supervisor to make phone calls explaining why they will not be able to volunteer for America Reads. This duty should NEVER fall on you as a VISTA.

Many times you may advertise the program and a training session and some people may show up that you haven't run a background check on yet. You may have some excellent volunteers in this group. To not discriminate and rule out any volunteer, welcome them into your training, give them the folder of information, and have them fill it out. Tell them that someone will get back to them and let them know if they can be placed with a child.

Some potential tutors may sign up that have clean records, but you have a funny feeling about them working with a child. In such cases you could always assign this person another task that would help the program, such as posting fliers or putting folders together. Not everyone is cut out to read with children, and that's okay. Remember that any person that wants to volunteer and clears the background checks has a big heart and



just wants to help. There are many ways that you can use volunteers without having to compromise your intuition.

see Appendix for Authorization to Release Form

contributed by VISTA chef Roxanne Hovenkotter



Squeezing The Fruit At The Farmer's Market: Soliciting from Local Businesses

While in search for funding and materials for your program, don't forget to check out the local businesses who might be able to help you. Small businesses will often be very helpful if you approach them in the right way. Sometimes you have the ability to walk in off the street and ask for help, but more often it's best to write the business a letter, and then do a follow up in person. Here are some tips to remember when writing a letter of request to local businesses.

- When you live in the same town, it's good to **know the name of the owner or store manager**. Be sure to write a formal letter, and address the letter and the envelope to the owner or manager.
- **Be specific.** Don't solicit in general. When you write to the business, tell them about the program (maybe include a brochure), and tell them what you're looking for.
- **Goods may be preferable to money.** As in tip #2, ask specifically what they might be able to donate to the program. This also helps them so they don't have to wonder what you might need, and you'll be more assured to get what you need.
- **Ask in advance.** Don't ask the night before you need some donated food. Be sure to make contact several weeks to several days in advance, depending on what you need.
- **Thank them publicly**, at the least. At the end of the program, or event where the donated goods were used, you will most likely write a press release of some form. Be sure to state in the press release what goods were donated by which businesses. This helps to give them a bit of free advertising, shows that you are indeed appreciative, and helps to also get the word out about your program. More businesses may follow suit to donate in the future.

see Appendix for Sample Business Letter

contributed by VISTA chef Sarah L. Hill



Bountiful Harvest: Grant Writing

Grant writing is perceived as a difficult process.
The key is to be both passionate about your program and
logical about improving it.

Here's a bit of the logic.



Cover Letter

"Should be humanizing"

-Foundation's Guide to Grantmaking

Chairman of the board or the chief executive officer of your agency should sign the letter
(I think that is you or your principal).

- Make a specific request: don't make the reader dig for your request
Include paragraphs about why applying to this particular funder (without arrogating their giving statement).
- Note references but do not name drop
- Tell what will be included. i.e. "Enclosed you will find..."
- Cite name of project, what it will accomplish and the dollar amount
- Ask for meeting with funder in last paragraph. Indicate your willingness to answer questions or provide additional information

Cover Page

Request Developed For _____
Proposal to XYZ Foundation
Title of project (request amount optional)

Submitted by

Your name- should be the same person who signed all other papers

Your address

Your phone

Your email, fax, other line etc.

Letter Proposal- Less Formal

- No more than 3 pages

This type of request may be used for situations that do not warrant an entire grant proposal. For example, if you have already been funded and the foundation knows your program, you may want to use the letter proposal. You may also want to use the letter proposal for a smaller amount of money. Many organizations ask for an initial letter of intent or proposal letter before inviting you to continue with the application process.

Structure of the letter proposal

- Ask for the gift
- Describe the need
- Explain what you will do - same as project description
- Provide agency data: let funders know a little more about the organization through mission statement, description of services offered, # of people served, staff, volunteer, and board information
- Include appropriate budget data (maybe 1/2 page long). Indicate the total cost of project as well as your request.
- Conclusion - restate your case in only 2 paragraphs
- Attach additional information as appendix- list attachments following signature
 - ❖ board list
 - ❖ IRS determination
 - ❖ financial documentation
 - ❖ resumes of key staff

Tips for the Proposal Writer

"The grant reader needs to understand the people behind the proposal."

- The Foundation's Guide to Grant Making

- Document must be **self-explanatory**. You will not be there to explain it, or to sell it with your charms. Leave it simply stated and easy to read.
- **Get your thoughts sorted out before you begin.** Be sure that you want to write this grant, what project you will be asking the foundation to fund, what you want to do with the money, whether you really need the money.
- **Outline what you want to say.**
- **Avoid jargon** - if it is an acronym, explain it. Avoid technical terms that may be confusing to outsiders. They will only frustrate the reader, not make you look smart.
- **Include anecdotal evidence** to spice up the proposal. Remember, the readers need to see the people behind the paper grant. Be careful NOT to overstate, or exaggerate your case.
- **Ask the foundation what kind of proposal they prefer.** If they will accept a common application, use your Master Proposal for the common application. This will save you a lot of work.

"A proposal should be a story. You should speak to the reader and tell the reader a story, something you want him/ her to visualize, hear, feel"
- Foundation's Guide to Grantmaking

Getting Started

1. 501(c)(3) status

- in general, most grants ask that organizations they donate to qualify as non-profits under the IRS tax code of 501(c)(3). Unfortunately, this can take a while to apply for. If you do not have this status, often you can find another non-profit organization to work as your "fiscal agent."

2. Fiscal Agent

-an organization acting as a fiscal agent for America Reads would have the 501(c)(3) designation. All the money from a successful grant would go directly to the fiscal agent rather than directly to America Reads. The agent would handle funds and provide financial reports. All other contact would remain your responsibility. In other words, you still have to show your impact, evaluate and report. The funder will require a formal written statement from your fiscal agent organization stating their willingness to act as a fiscal agent for your program. Many times, the fiscal agent charges a fee for this service. Some organizations to consider for this position are: your parent-teacher-council, local charity groups such as Lions, Kiwanis, Toastmasters, etc. This is a good way to tap into resources in the community without having to try to find a board of directors, and a treasurer etc. of your own.

see Appendix for Letter from United Way

contributed by VISTA chef Jamie Gibbs



A Healthy Preservative For Your Program: Coalition Building

Coalition Building is the essential part of your program's sustainability, but the big question is "How do I exactly go about this? Furthermore, what *is* a coalition?" This section will address these issues and give you a step-by-step plan of how to build a coalition.

First, let's define a coalition. A coalition is a group of people coming together for the betterment of a common goal. Betterment can include streamlining volunteer recruitment, group grant writing, and community service partnerships. The common goal is helping children read on grade level.

When building your coalition, it is important to think outside of the "America Reads Box" and invite any group or individual that would help with the common goal of helping children read on grade level. This does not need to be an America Reads coalition, but rather a reading or educational coalition. Go over your list of stakeholders and contact groups that may be interested. Sit down with your supervisor, principal, and teachers and ask who they perceive to be the key players in literacy and education in your community. This could include First Steps, STAR, HOST, Special Educators, RSVP Director, churches, school and city librarians, and members of the local reading council.

Once you have a list of possible members it is time for an informational coalition meeting. Send out invitations to everyone on your list and stress the importance of working together. At your first meeting, stress the importance of working together and come up with goals for the coalition. Some of these goals might be fundraising, grant writing, volunteer recruitment and awareness. Make sure before you leave the meeting that you set a date for the next meeting and give everyone an assignment such as composing a mission statement for the coalition or searching for literacy grants on the Internet.

Now that you have gathered these key players, it is important to have a meeting every two to three months and make sure that you check in on individual members monthly. You must also make sure that your coalition will ensure sustainability for the America Reads program. An ideal coalition is one that is formed by you but not run by you. As meetings progress, you will see that certain leaders will emerge. Put one of these leaders in charge of future meetings. Often a reading council is a good source for finding a leader that will head the coalition after you have completed your term of service.

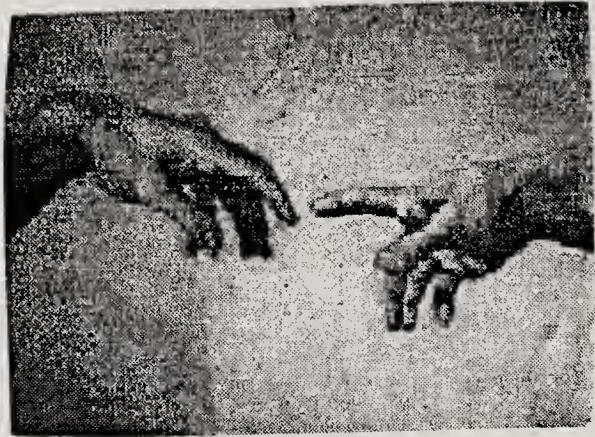
Forming a literacy coalition is one of the most difficult and time-consuming parts of the Community Action Plan. However, if you are successful at uniting the literacy stakeholders of your community, the coalition will become a self-motivating organism that will promote literacy awareness long after you have implemented America Reads.

contributed by VISTA chef Jamie King



Outreach

Outreach can be one of the trickiest parts of VISTA service. However, it is also one of the most important. Outreach is the act of involving the entire community in the America Reads program by introducing it to schools within a 50-mile radius of your host site. Many VISTAs don't realize when they start their year of service that they are not "owned" by their host site. You are a community-based VISTA, and a big part of sustainability is implementing the program in as many schools as you can. That being said, how do you go about achieving this Herculean task when it seems hard enough to mobilize volunteers at your own school? Here are some tips that have helped previous VISTAs:

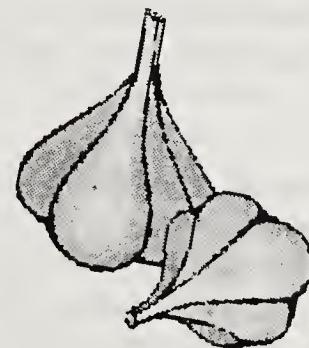


- **Start the PR early.** When you start the program at your host site, send out letters to other schools in the area talking about what you're doing and give your contact information. You'll be really busy at this point, so this may be all that you can do.
- **Follow up with "face time."** No school will be interested if they're just getting a random letter, so follow this up by visiting the school and making an appointment to talk to the principal, reading specialist, or Title I teacher. You can talk about how well your program is going and if the school is interested, you can work on implementing the tutoring program there during the spring semester.
- **Give presentations at meetings.** Find out when a school's PTA is meeting and see if you can talk for a few minutes about the program. Or see if there are any meetings where several schools in the region get together and take advantage of that time.
- **Invite other schools to literacy events.** If your host site is having a literacy event that can handle a few extra folks extend an invite to children and parents of outreach schools. This can be a fun way for them to learn about the program.
- **Use your connections,** no matter how tenuous. Maybe the reading teacher's cousin's son goes to an outreach school—use it to promote the program by word of mouth.
- **Get some gas money.** Outreach can be expensive because many Montana communities are not close in proximity. Talk to your host site or to OPI about getting some mileage reimbursement. If you're a Title I or 21st Century grant school this should not be a problem.
- **Have contacts at every school.** If you can only get to an outreach school one day a week, make sure there's a contact who can talk with volunteers and

knows somewhat how the program runs. This can be a teacher or a parent, or even a very responsible high school student. Be sure to check in with this contact frequently and reward them for their work. Who knows?---they could turn into your site coordinator and your program is sustainable. Voila!

- **Give priority to your host site.** Although you are community-based, your host site has done all of the paperwork to get you to be “their” VISTA, so make the host site program the first on your list. That being said, your supervisor has NO RIGHT to tell you that you aren’t allowed to do outreach, because that is part of your job. If this becomes an issue, show your supervisor the outreach section in the Community Action Plan. If this doesn’t work, call June at OPI and she’ll help you from there.
- Outreach can mean collaboration. Although outreach can be a difficult chore, if you are able to spread the program to other schools you’re well on your way to sustainability and coalition building. On a lighter note, wouldn’t it be fun to get the kids from both schools together to do fun literacy events?

contributed by VISTA chef Katie Jensen



When It's Barbecue Time: Summer Reading Programs



When the school year draws to a close and kids and teachers make the exodus into summer activities, it is certainly time for a well-deserved VISTA break. Then it's time to start the final phase of the term of service: the summer reading program.

Studies show that during summer vacations children must remain diligent in maintaining and improving their reading skills or they may have to re-learn many concepts when they return to school in the fall. This is why it's important for you to be a part of encouraging reading during the summer months.

Implementing a summer reading program in a community may seem difficult at first. You may think that everyone will be camping at the lake or taking a family trip to Disneyland. You may even encounter some parents who don't want to make their children read because they're on a break from school. But most likely you will be able to have a successful, well-attended program if you follow a few rules of thumb.

- **Team up with the library.** Often the local public library already has some sort of reading program in existence. As the school year draws to a close, meet with the children's librarian and talk about how America Reads can play a part in the library's program. You may be able to add on an America Reads activity to what the library is already doing. Or you may be able to use the library to do summer tutoring once a week. The nice thing about summer reading programs is that they allow you to be a little more flexible and creative with the format, and nine times out of ten you will have help from the local library.
- **Don't reinvent the wheel.** If you're not the most creative person on earth don't panic! Every year the Montana State Library picks a theme for summer reading, and you can use that theme for your own program. The State Library will even send you a packet of materials to help you get started. The theme for Summer 2001 was "Reading Road Trip USA." One VISTA used this theme by hanging a map of the United States in the library. Every time a child read for a certain amount of time, their progress was marked by a vehicle moving across the country. When they reached the eastern seaboard, the child would receive a prize donated by local merchants. Another VISTA used this theme to encourage 5th-8th graders to visit the library during the summer. She chose four books about various journeys and set up weekly book club meetings to talk about the books and added the incentive of doing crafts and having a pool party.
- **If the library won't work, don't give up!** Some VISTAs chose other spaces in which to do summer reading activities. One VISTA was able to use rooms at her host site and hire a reading specialist to do weeklong reading summer camps. Along with improving their reading and writing skills they also enjoyed outdoor activities. Another VISTA set up a drama camp where

children could practice their reading skills by putting on a play for the community. These were both innovative and successful ways to keep literacy on the front burner during the summer time.

- **Advertise early.** You have a captive audience during the school year; so don't wait until everyone has gone home for summer vacation to talk about summer reading programs. Send home notes with students, put up posters at school and around town, and talk to volunteers about tutoring in the summer a few weeks before the semester is over.
- **Don't forget to fundraise.** In the summer, incentives are good. Go to local merchants and see if they will donate prizes for children who take time to read during their vacation. The prizes don't have to be exorbitant, as most children are pleased with a free ice cream cone from the Dairy Queen or a pizza party at the end of the summer.

see Appendix for Summer Reading ditto

Summer Program Sample

This summer program was based on the main program but loosened it up for the summer.

A press release was sent out to the newspaper asking for people in the community to volunteer as reading buddies for the summer reading program at the library. The library also had their own program on Thursdays, based on the state theme for that year. Working with them, the summer reading program was scheduled for Tuesday and Wednesday afternoons from 1:00-3:00 p.m. The library program was scheduled for Thursdays from 1:00-2:30. This worked out perfectly so that families could send their children to the library at the same time for three days in a row.

On the end of the year evaluation for all the tutors, there had been a section that asked if the tutor would be interested in working with the summer program. As the school tutoring program had already ended for the year, each tutor who had shown interest was contacted and told about the schedule for the summer.

A folder containing the summer schedule was left at the library for people interested in volunteering as reading buddies to sign up. Sign up sheets for each Tuesday and Wednesday were clearly marked where the volunteers could write their names under the dates they would come, as well as the time they would arrive. The folder also contained an address sheet where all volunteers would write their address and phone number in case they had to be reached. The volunteers would then take one of two possible handouts.

The green handouts were for those volunteers who had already worked with the program at the school. They contained a list of expectations for the summer reading program. These expectations included: wearing a Reading Buddy pin so that they can be recognized in the library, calling ahead of time in case of absences, seeking out a librarian or the VISTA in case of problems, and the time schedule and duration of the summer reading program. The purple handouts were a condensed version of the information given to tutors at their training sessions. The stapled information explained how to read with children, ideas for reading with pre-literate children, etc. They also included the information in the green handouts.

Next, the children were told of the program through their teachers and handouts sent home. The children targeted for the summer reading program were those who would be entering grades K-3 in the fall. The K-2 teachers all received a letter explaining the summer program and its intentions. Either with the letter, or shortly after, the teachers then received a stack of colorful brochures to hand out for their students to take home. The logo chosen was an owl reading a book.

The summer reading program began two weeks after school let out for the summer, and one week after the library's reading program began. A second press release was sent out to alert parents to the sign-ups for the summer reading program at the library. A second folder was placed at the library for parents to sign up their children. Sign-up sheets in the folder consisted of a space for the child's name, age, grade entering in the fall, parents' names, address, and phone. They were also given a handout with the expectations for the children in the summer reading program consisting of the schedule and duration of the summer reading program, waiting patiently if there were other children waiting for a reading buddy, the choices for reading, and that by getting a minimum of seven stickers on their cards (more on this below) they would receive a prize.

Local business and national book chains were solicited for donations to the summer reading program during the spring months. Unfortunately there was not a wide response from the local businesses, but one store was able to donate a stack of sticker sheets. Other donations consisted of books for the children as well as money for purchasing gifts. A large donation of books had been received earlier in the school year and not all of the books had been given away.

Using die-cut blocks at the schools, shapes of cars, trucks, busses, and covered wagons were cut out of many colors of construction paper, and then laminated. (The state theme was Reading Road Trip USA, and this was to help tie into the library's program a little.)

When children arrived at the library for their first chance to read, they would find a volunteer at the front desk. In this case the volunteer was the VISTA. A small Summer Reading Program sign had been made with the reading owl. This helped the children see who to go to, as well as get other people, who had not yet signed up, to ask more about the program. The children were asked which of the cards they would like. Their name would then be written on the card, which they would take with them to the reading buddy.

Books were read to pre-literate children. Often the reading buddies would help them read a word that was common in a book, such as a character's name, and have the child say it when they reached it. Other children were asked to read to the reading buddies, or to read with them in chorus. The reading format was left up to the decision of each reading buddy and child, but with the request that each child be encouraged to read.

After reading with a reading buddy, they would receive a sticker on the card. Children received a sticker for each session with a reading buddy, not for each book read, and only one sticker per day. This made for an easy visual aid for the children, so they could track their progress themselves. The reading buddy would be sure to either take the card from the child or send them directly back to the front desk to return it.

Children were aware that by getting seven stickers on these cards, they would receive a prize. This prize was a stack of three or four books for their age level. The books were awarded to the children on the last day of the program at 3:10 p.m., after the reading time had ended. This time helped to make children and parents aware of when

the prizes would be received, and helped to encourage the children to keep coming even if they reached seven before the end of the program. Those last ten minutes were helpful to make sure that the tally of children who had read seven times was accurate and all those who deserved the prizes would receive them.

All children who participated received a certificate of participation. Children who had not met the seven sticker requirement, were given a small gift of a sheet of stickers if they were in attendance at 3:10 on the last day.

The reading buddies had no requirement for time or regularity. Most of the reading buddies arrived at 1:00, but they could come at any time during the two hours. The minimum amount of time they were required to stay was 20 minutes; however, most of them remained a minimum of 45 minutes. They were also not required to come once a week or anything like that. Several came once, and one came every day. This helped to vary the reading buddies and get more people involved who were unable to keep to a regular schedule.

When the reading buddies arrived they would check their names off in the volunteer folder to show that they had arrived. They would then put on a Reading Buddies pin that had been homemade with a button maker. Each one had a picture of the owl with the words "Reading Buddy." The reading buddies also received a sheet of stickers, a pen, and a check in sheet.

The reading buddy would write the name of a child they met with on the check-in sheet, along with the date, number of books read, and approximate time spent together. This helped to ensure that the stickers were not the only record of the children's attendance. It was also a good way to keep track of time spent and books read for the press release sent out at the program's conclusion. Statistics are always good for press releases.

contributed by VISTA chef Sarah L. Hill



Tasted Good & Was Filling: Evaluations



Evaluating the program is extremely important to do on a periodic basis. The easiest is usually at the end of the sessions. Most of the programs run on an eight or ten week session with one in the fall and a second in the spring.

The way that I run evaluations make it as simple and "painless" as possible. I also prefer to get evaluations from the tutors, teachers, and even from the students. I don't do self-evaluations, as I believe that I am evaluating the program from my own perspective each day, but you may prefer to do something for yourself.

Students

Students are the easiest, as their evaluations fall into the normal paperwork that the tutors are informed of at the tutor training. The method of evaluation, both of and by the students, is done through the Motivation Interview. I use the interview adapted by Lesley Mandel Morrow and Barbara J. Walker, and can be found on page 29 of *Training the Reading Team*. It is to be read by the tutors to the student on the first day of the session when they are getting to know each other. The interview consists of questions such as "Do you like to read during your free time?" and "What kind of a reader are you?". These questions have three answers for each question and are given a number of 2, 1, and 0, and help to show the tutors and you how the student perceives reading and their abilities of reading.

At the end of the session, I give another Motivation Interview to the tutors. They ask the students the questions again, and I am able to see if there is any change in the answers. Often this can be very helpful since some students won't show a lot of progress in their reading ability in a way that can be tested, but they will have a more positive outlook at themselves as readers. This can be a great achievement in and of itself.

If, at the end of the first session, you know the students will be continuing on and participating in the second session, I would not recommend giving the interview at the end of the first session as they will be answering them again at the beginning of session two. This is unneeded and tedious.

Tutors

The tutor input can often be the most important to the program as they are there "in the trenches" throughout.

At the end of each session, tutors are given an evaluation around their last week. At the top of the evaluation is space for their name and their student, followed by a brief paragraph thanking them and explaining the reason for the evaluation.

First session evaluations also serve as a check to see which tutors will be returning and their availability. The questions are quick and simple.

- Do you plan to tutor again during Session 2?
- How many days each week would you like to volunteer next session?

- What days and times will work best for you? –I then list the days and the times available each day. If you have a more open program where it is dependent on each child, simply have them write their own times in.
- If you participate in Session 2 and your student remains in the program, would you like the same student or a new one?
- Age/Grade/School preference –I had three schools in town to work with.

In the following questions, I leave space for the tutors to write comments.

- Did you see improvement in the child you worked with?
- What questions about teaching specific reading skills, working with children, or tutoring format would you have liked more information on during the tutor training session?
- Did you notice areas of the program where clarification and/or improvement are needed?
- Do you know the name of another adult who would like to tutor a student next session?

At the end of the second session, the end of the year, the questions are slightly altered.

- Did you see improvement in the child you worked with?
- What do you see as your strengths as a tutor?
- What questions about teaching specific reading skills, working with children, or tutoring format would you have liked more information on during the tutor training session?
- Did you notice areas of the program where clarification and/or improvement are needed?
- Would you be interested in tutoring again in the future?
- Would you like more information about the summer program?
- Would you like us to contact you when the fall session begins?
- Please make up your own evaluation question and answer it for yourself. ☺

Teachers

The teachers are also very important eyes and ears of the program since they see the effect of the tutoring on a daily basis. In my program, we had tutors coming at lunch and after school, so the teachers didn't have as much direct involvement in the program. If you have tutoring during the school time, your teachers would be more involved, but it is still a good idea to get an evaluation from them at the end.

Due to the teachers not having a lot of daily information about the reading sessions, I would give them several sheets of information along with the evaluation.

- **Tutoring Log**—I ran a Xerox of the daily log sheet the tutors made of how the day went and the books they read. The teachers then know what was done and how the student's attitude was as well. The teachers often could use this during parent/teacher conferences to discuss the work that the tutoring is doing for their students.

- **Report of Notes from the Tutor & Number of meetings**—This was done very easily with help from my database. After inputting the information from the tutor evaluations, I could print out this information neatly on sheets for each teacher. The reports had the names of the students, tutor's names, number of session, and the notes the tutor made about the student and noticeable improvement.

The actual evaluation for the teachers was far shorter than those for the tutors. The teachers have a lot more work to do and usually our sessions ended around quarter endings and so didn't have a lot of time for long questions. I was just sure to leave enough room for them to write a response.

- Did you see any noticeable changes in your students who were being tutored?
Ex. Better self esteem, more willing to read, better behavior, etc.
- Are there any facets of the program you would like to be more involved with or be kept up to date of in the future?

Teachers were often very busy and unable to get the evaluations to me in a reasonable amount of time. I usually stated at the bottom of the paper to return to my box in the office by X, which was usually within a week or so. If you give them too much time they lose it on their desks. I would often have to leave a reminder in their boxes about their evaluations after several weeks, and sometimes have to visit with them personally to give them another copy of the evaluation sheet since it was lost in the bottomless pit of papers around them. Be patient but be persistent without getting annoying. An unhappy and hurried teacher is no one's friend.

Test Scores

Test scores can also help to evaluate the program. In my district, we test for fluency and cloze in September, January, and May. I got the test scores for my students from the reading specialists, and then plugged the numbers into Excel and graphed them. (I recommend taking a refresher course or a crash-course in Excel for graphing.) Numbers tell a lot, but a visual graph is very revealing and can help a lot when trying to make a case to other schools or in grant writing. I was also able to get several scores of students who were not in the program, of both average and low readers to show the marked change in some of the tutored students. In some it was very high and very noticeable.

contributed by VISTA chef Sarah L. Hill

A Simmering & Savory Brew: Random Tips



- Get a business card.
- Have your own logo.
- Take needed time off, or talk to your supervisor about burnout.
 - This isn't a job that requires you to burnout. If you need to deal with personal issues, take time to work them out.
- Get involved in your community beyond literacy issues. This can help you with contacts throughout your year.
- Find another non-profit you can volunteer for.
- Make sure that you have the option to work odd hours, and accumulate comp time.
- Do yoga, breathing, meditation—take time to stretch, slow down. Empty yourself of everything once a day,
- Rules can be bent, but use your judgment.
- Don't be afraid to leave the office. If you need a donation, go to the store or the business yourself.
- Don't freak out if you don't have volunteers in your first month.
- ASK if you have a question rather than just going ahead and just doing it.
- Having a book drive is one of the cheapest and most effective ways to raise money and coordinate a literacy event.
- Get all medical procedures done under medical insurance of AmeriCorps. How often will you have a \$5 co-pay?
- Apply for LIEAP, and start immediately because it takes a couple months to process. This can help reduce your heating bill.
- "Be proud to use your food stamps, and remember to bring the front cover, because it is federal law." —Katie the Naderite
- "Keep the bottom line, reading for kids, in mind when the bulls**t and the bureaucracy gets too deep." - Margaret de Harlowe
- "When things go wrong, take all the responsibility, be direct and honest, apologize and move on so that no one has to play the blame game." - Momma Erin
- "Remember the only payment your volunteers receive is a good experience and positive comments." - Momma Erin
- "When dealing with people err on the side of positive" - Erin the Nurturer
- "One guideline that I gave myself, was that if I was not reading to my children 20-30 minutes a day, I needed to stop doing my VISTA stuff and read to my kids." - Momma Erin
- "My biggest mistake is bogging down the volunteers with too much paper work... the simpler the program, the better the chances for sustainability." - Roxanne the Organizer
- "Don't bulls**t on your quarterly reports. If you didn't do something, just don't write it in." - Katie the OPI Miracle

- “Collaborate with other AmeriCorps people in your area. They may have almost the same program as you.” – Katie the OPI Miracle
- “Make inroads with the town library and the town newspaper within the first couple months.” Sarah aka “Batgirl”
- “Free food can guarantee attendance at any function.”- Sarah aka “Batgirl”



Dessert & Coffee: Conclusion



Okay. Take a breath. Take a nap.
Take a nightcap. Do whatever you require to absorb
everything that you just read. This may not all apply to
you right now, but in a few months you may realize that
the ants have made off with your sugar, the bread isn't rising like it should, or the meat
has spoiled. If so, use this book for reference and then "you'll be cookin' with gas!"

So good luck, namaste, happy trails, keep your stick on the ice, eyes on the prize,
and both hands on the wheel . . . it's going to be a bumpy ride! And you're going to love
it!

Bon Áppetit!

Jamie Gibbs,
Sarah L. Hill,
Katie Jensen

Handbook Editors

Dinner Mints by the Door: Appendix



Press Release For Wakina Sky . . .from Communications

Authorization to Release Information Form . . .from Background Checks

Letter to Businesses . . .from Soliciting Local Businesses

Letter From United Way . . .from Grant Writing

All Roads . . .From Summer Reading Programs

Need Help?

These America Reads alums will be happy to answer your questions:

Margaret Augustine	pegae@mtintouch.net
Jamie Gibbs	gibber11@hotmail.com
Sarah Hill	nightwater@hotmail.com
Katie Jensen	jensenkathryn@hotmail.com
Jamie King	iek7@hotmail.com



Montana participates in America Reads!

The first thing one sees upon entering the Helena Indian Alliance after school on a Monday is two people on the steps, one reading to the other. Then three people in the hallway, two children taking turns reading to a tutor. Opening the door to the room that looks most like a classroom, and is indeed the Wakina Sky Learning Circle, one finds four more pairs: one on the couch, three at small tables. Then through a short hallway into the computer lab, another pair. Past the fish tank and peek into a room shaped like a utility closet, another student, another adult.

All reading. And listening.

Back around the tank with no fish, through the hallway, out the door, and open another door, this time into a room in the throes of renovation.

Behind draped bookcases and lamps lacking shades sit the last pair: AmeriCorps*VISTA (Volunteers in Service to America) member, Dave Jersey, and student, Chaz L.

"I keep getting the long ones," Dave teases, referring to the wordy passage on his page. Chaz laughs and reads his few words. For several pages, they take turns. When Chaz has many lengthy passages in a row, Dave offers to trade.

"No," Chaz says. "I'll do it."

Although Wakina Sky has offered an after school tutoring program for

three years, Dave says reading aloud wasn't emphasized until they began a Montana America Reads program this fall. Only in its third month, Dave says he can see a difference — where there wasn't reading before, there is now. And he can hear a difference too — kids used to stumble, but the words are coming more easily.

In 1998, when a Montana America Reads State Office was opened within the Office of Public Instruction, it outlined one objective: for all Montana children to learn to read well and independently. But to help children learn to read, someone has to be listening. Help came in the form of AmeriCorps*VISTA members who collaborated with the state office to provide reading-tutor training and reading-tutor programs. Over the last two years, seven programs were founded across Montana. For the 2000-2001 school year, another thirteen were added, including Wakina Sky's.

Dave says he uses any contact with the public — flyers at powwow, the service day at Carroll College, open houses at the elementary schools — to recruit potential tutors. It seems to work best when a child has the same tutor at least two days a week

From 4 to 4:30 p.m., Monday through Thursday, before any other activities, children at Wakina Sky read. And someone listens.

"Ralph and Mo, Mo," Chaz starts, then stops and looks at Dave with uncertainty.

"You know it,"

Dave says.

Chaz thinks a minute. "Mortimer?" He guesses.



Dave nods.
"Are you sure?" Chaz asks.
"Yes," Dave answers.

"Ralph and Mortimer are coming back soon . . ." Chaz reads and reads and reads. ■

— June Atkins, Director OPI
America Reads and Lorna Milne,
Contributing Editor,
Montana Schools

Editor's Note: If you would like more information about Wakina Sky's program, write Wakina Sky's program, write Wakina

Readers and listeners (including Chaz L and AmeriCorps*VISTA member Dave Jersey, above) gather after school at Helena's Wakina Sky, one of 20 America Reads programs operating in Montana.

POLSON SCHOOL DISTRICT 23

AUTHORIZATION TO RELEASE INFORMATION

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN:

I, _____, am seeking employment or volunteer assignment with the Polson School District. I acknowledge that a complete investigation into my background is necessary to protect the safety and welfare of the children in the Polson School District. I hereby expressly and voluntarily give the Polson School District the right to make a thorough investigation of my past employment, education, and activities. I specifically authorize the release of any and all information of a confidential or privileged nature, including confidential criminal justice information as defined in Section 44-5-103(3), MCA, to the staff of the Polson School District and its agents. I understand that the Polson School District reserves the right to use any lawful method of investigation that, in its sole discretion, it deems reasonable and necessary.

I hereby release the Polson School District and any organization, company, institution, or person furnishing information to the District and its agents as expressly authorized above, from any liability for damage which may result from any dissemination of the information requested, subject to the provisions of Title 44, Chapter 5, Part 3, MCA.

This document is effective until revoked in writing by me.

SIGNATURE

DATE

Print Full Name: _____

Print Full Address: _____

City

State

Zip

Birth Date: _____ Social Security Number: _____

(Adopted: 01/11/99)



America Reads - LINKS For Learning
401 View Vista Dr.
Livingston, MT 59047
222-8587 shill@livingston.k12.mt.us

B. Dalton
2825 W. Main St.
Bozeman, MT 59715

May 8, 2001

Dear Store Manager,

I am a coordinator for the America Reads program here in Livingston, Montana. I am writing to see if you would be interested in donating to our program.

Our America Reads program matches students, who need extra help in reading, with adults from the community. The students, who are primarily in grades one and two, read with their tutors one-on-one for a minimum of thirty minutes a week during the school year. Children who are involved in this program show an increased interest in books and reading, as well as school.

This summer we will be providing "Reading Friends" at the Livingston - Park County Library for children entering kindergarten through grade three in the autumn. Volunteers from the community will be available for children to read with during afternoons. Children will work to read a minimum of seven books with the volunteer Reading Friends. We would like to present the children who meet this minimum, with books and other literacy based prizes that they can take home and keep. Studies have shown that children who read a minimum of six books during the summer maintain or improve their reading skills, while students who do not lose ground by September. Often children lose five to six months of learning over the three months of summer.

If you would be interested in donating anything for our program to give to the children, please send them to the address listed above or contact us and we can come pick them up. Suggested donations include books, bookmarks, puzzles, and reading games.

I am enclosing a brochure, and if you have any further questions about the program, please contact me at the address above.

Thank you for your interest.
Sincerely,

Sarah Hill
AmeriCorps VISTA -- America Reads coordinator

United Way

of Gallatin County

P.O. Box 206
1516 W. Babcock, #2
Bozeman, Montana 59771
(406) 587-2194
(406) 586-0996 Fax

e-mail: uwaygc@in-tch.com
www.gomontana.com/unitedway

Staff:
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Executive Director
Rebecca Kelley
Administrative Asst.

Officers:
Mike Hegel
President
Joe Billion
1st Vice President
Rick Weaver
2nd Vice President
Kathy Malone
Secretary
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Treasurer

Directors:
Susan Barbisan
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Diane Cook
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Joe Dahinden
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Tom Egelhoff
Dee Field
Joan Ford
Pat Frey
Marie Gary
Zoe Gleason
Paul Gorie
Jaynee Groseth
Chuck Hoge
Penny Idland
Scott Lease
Jack Leddick
John Nordwick
Kristena Mills
Heidi Parkes
John Parkes, Jr.
Carol Jean Roehm
Stephanie Stephens
Buzz Tarlow

May 4, 2001

Mark Halgren and Board of Directors
Belgrade Public Schools
Eagle's Nest After-School Program & America Reads Program
P.O. Box 166
Belgrade, Montana 59714

Dear Mark and Board Members,

The United Way Board of Directors is pleased to award your organization \$3,500 for the Eagle's Nest Program and \$2,000 for the America Reads Program from the Community Fund and \$101 in donor designations. The funds will be used to provide scholarships for families of Ridge View Elementary School who cannot afford to send their children to your programs.

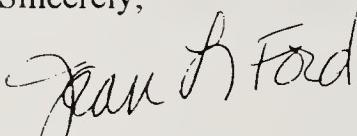
The Community Fund money will be distributed monthly beginning on July 1, 2001 after United Way has received the enclosed Statement of Agreement approved and signed by your Board of Directors. Designations will be distributed as described in the Statement of Agreement.

The volunteers who reviewed your grant were concerned that last year Ridge View Elementary was unable to spend out the funds for scholarships for the Eagle's Nest Program. They presume the need for scholarships exists and that the trauma of opening a new school was distracting. The volunteers encourage the program to identify and work sensitively with the families who could benefit from scholarships. They feel that this program meets a real need for affordable after school care in a fast-growing community. They commend the program for having met licensing requirements quickly and efficiently.

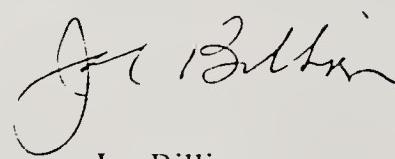
In the budget next year, there will be no need to break out scholarships on an expense line. The UW scholarship funds should be itemized as revenue and the copy of the grant should discuss how many children/families received scholarship assistance.

The America Reads program was extremely well received. The volunteers compliment the coordinator for her energy and the clarity of her presentation. We encourage the continued building of partnerships in the community that will help sustain the program. The funds requested are for supplies, travel, training for tutors and literacy activities.

Sincerely,


Joan Ford

Allocation Chair


Joe Billion

Board President

ALL ROADS LEAD TO YOUR LIBRARY

Yes! Sign me up for the READING ROAD TRIP USA.... For grades K-4 sign here! Thursday Storytime at the Library from 3-4 PM... Weekly crafts... Pit Stop Picnic... Pool Party... More! Parents and children are welcome at all events of the READING ROAD TRIP USA. Events will be held every Thursday from June 7 through July 26, 2001.

Name:

Address:

Phone:

Grade completed:

Age:

Parent/Guardian

Address

Day Phone:

Evening Phone:

This is a volunteer, community effort. Please check at least one area where you can help support this summer literacy program. THANK YOU IN ADVANCE FOR YOUR HELP!

I will donate my time. Please call me.

I will donate food or snacks such as _____.

I am enclosing a dollar or more to cover supplies. Amount enclosed _____.

PARENT PLEDGE: I agree to support my child in his/her efforts to read or be read to at least 20 minutes daily this summer. I also agree that my child is solely my responsibility at any function of the Valier Public Library during Summer 2001.

Signature: _____

CHILD PLEDGE: I agree to make an effort to read 20 minutes daily this summer, and to be faithful in my attendance to library events for the READING ROAD TRIP USA.

Signature: _____



Seasonal
Mort. Trends
1980-1983



